



Department of State
Consumer Protection

Navigating Housing Scams

A FIVE PART SERIES

Part 5: Moving & Storage

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Navigating Housing Scams: **Moving** & Storage

Moving your belongings can be a stressful process. Unfortunately, scammers use these situations to defraud consumers out of thousands of dollars. Learning all you can about these scams is the best way to help prevent things from going wrong and keep your belongings safe.

In the final week of a five-part housing scam series, the **Division of Consumer Protection** provides consumer tips to avoid moving and storage company scams.

For more tips on how to navigate housing scams, check out our other [comprehensive guides](#).



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Navigating Housing Scams: **Moving** & Storage



Tips When Moving

Pay Attention to Bait and Switch Sales Practices

This deceptive practice involves providing an initial misleading quote and then making last-minute changes to agreed-upon price quotes.

Be wary of companies that offer instant quotes instead of gathering detailed information to provide an accurate estimate. When you receive a binding estimate, you cannot be required to pay more than that amount unless you've requested additional services after the estimate is signed.



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Tips When Moving (continued)

Pay Attention to Deceptive Business Practices

Deceptive business practices include:

- ✓ Late deliveries with no advance notification
- ✓ Delivering damaged goods
- ✓ Holding items hostage until consumers provide additional amounts of money
- ✓ Failure to fulfill any of its contractual obligations

Avoid dealing with any business that engages in these practices by doing general online research and learning your rights as outlined below.



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Tips When Moving (continued)

Review All Terms and Conditions Prior to Loading

Before the movers have moved any of your items into the truck, meet with the company representative at your home to review the material terms of the contract, most notably the cost and delivery terms.

Do General Online Research

- ✓ Confirm that the moving company is an honest and reputable business with a physical address, has detailed contact information and is rated well by others in consumer reviews.
- ✓ Check the [Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's \(FMCSA\) National Consumer Complaint Database](#) or the [Better Business Bureau](#), which has a searchable database of consumer reviews.



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Tips When Moving (continued)

Hire Licensed or Registered Movers

Before hiring a moving company, confirm that it's a government-regulated entity.

- ✓ Moves within New York State (NYS): All moving companies must be licensed in New York. The NYS Department of Transportation licenses companies for moves statewide. For verification, call (518) 457-6512 or e-mail nymoving@dot.ny.gov.
- ✓ Moving out of state? Make sure the mover is insured and registered with the federal government. The [Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration](#) (FMCSA) registers companies that meet legal and safety requirements for moves between New York and other states. You can look up whether an interstate moving company is registered through the FMCSA's [Mover Registration Search](#) function.



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Tips When Moving (continued)

Get Multiple Estimates

Plan to get estimates from at least three companies. Do not rely on any estimates provided over the phone or email. Moving companies should gather detailed information about the number of items you need to move.

Pay Attention to Hidden or Additional Charges

Be wary of requests for large upfront payments or full payments in advance.

Never Sign a Blank or Incomplete Estimate

Unscrupulous movers could use the blank or incomplete estimate to change the terms of your move, including the cost, without your knowledge or consent.



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Tips When Moving (continued)

Get Written Estimates and Contracts

- ✓ Moving companies should give multiple documents before, during and after your move with information on the requested services, cost calculations and other agreements between you and the movers.
- ✓ Make sure you understand what terms in these documents are estimates, which can change later and which are contractual agreements. Scammers might try talking you out of signing written contracts if for some reason items get lost or stolen.

Create an Inventory of Your Belongings

Make a photo record and keep a written inventory of all your items.



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Tips When Moving (continued)

Know Your Rights

Insist the mover provides you with a [Summary of Information booklet](#) from the NYS Department of Transportation that describes your rights as a shipper. For interstate moves, the company is required to share the FMCSA's [guide](#), which includes details specific to interstate moves. Read these guides thoroughly to know your rights and responsibilities throughout the moving process.

Learn More About Hiring Moving Companies

Visit the FMCSA's [Protect Your Move](#) website for more resources on interstate movers. See the [NYS Department of Transportation's website](#) for more information on hiring movers within New York.



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Tips When Moving (continued)

Try to Resolve Any Disputes

If you have a dispute with an interstate mover, file a complaint with the FMCSA on their [National Consumer Complaint Database](#). If the move occurred entirely in New York, first notify the company in writing as soon as possible.

If you can't resolve the issue with the company and the dispute relates to the loss or damage of your goods, [file a complaint with DCP](#).

For all other dispute issues, file a complaint with the [NYS Department of Transportation](#).



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There are many things to consider when looking for a **storage facility**. Hiring the right facility can go a long way to protect your personal belongings, money and peace of mind. In this section, we share tips to help minimize the risk of being scammed.

For more tips on how to navigate housing scams, check out our [comprehensive guides](#).



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Tips When Looking for Storage Facilities

Pay Attention to Price: Dishonest storage facilities often lure customers into leasing storage units by advertising one price, then hiking up the price shortly after they sign a lease. Read the fine print and look for details in the promotional offers.

Carefully review written agreements: Under New York State law, storage facilities are required to outline details surrounding the safety of the items that are being stored and any associated costs. These details include:

- ✓ where the occupant's personal property will be stored,
- ✓ the monthly cost of the unit, including extra fees and
- ✓ the facilities' liability if something goes wrong.

It's important to pay attention to the details related to the responsibility of your possessions, amount of notice for raising rent and terms under which you're deemed to have defaulted.



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Tips When Looking for Storage Facilities (continued)

Visually Inspect Storage Facilities

- ✔ Check the security of any self-storage area. Confirm if the facility has a working surveillance system and good security.
- ✔ Confirm any advertised climate-controlled or temperature-controlled facilities are operating as advertised.
- ✔ Confirm the quality of the unit before you rent. Ensure the doors and locks work.
- ✔ Check the cleanliness of the unit before you rent. Ensure there are no entry points for rodents and that it is clear of any belongings or debris.



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Tips When Looking for Storage Facilities (continued)

Know Your Rights

- ✓ If you fall behind on payment, a storage facility can sell your possessions to cover costs. However, before they do that, they must provide you with an opportunity to pay the unpaid balance by providing an advance notice detailing an itemized statement of the amount due, description of the property, time and place of the sale and demand for payment.
- ✓ If the occupant is incapacitated or deceased, a trusted person should contact the storage facility to find out what steps to take to preserve the occupant's property.



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Tips When Looking for Storage Facilities (continued)

Exceptions For the Military

- ✔ Storage facilities cannot sell the possessions of active service members due to non-payment.
- ✔ Service members have ninety days after they complete their service to pay and recover items.



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